



## EXECUTIVE COMPUTING

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# PC program checks spelling as you type

**W**arning to typewriter owners: Look out! Just as the horse and buggy were made obsolete by the motorcar, and just as mechanical adding machines were replaced by electronic calculators — your standard typewriter is in for trouble.

Not only have word processing programs been introduced for personal computers (IBM PCs and others) that make everyday typing easier and more efficient, but now a new type of program has been released that goes even further. Called **Turbo Lightning**, it provides an amazing new benefit — it checks your spelling *while you type*. As a word is typed, the computer “beeps” if it does not recognize it. (The typed word is instantly checked against a dictionary stored in the computer’s memory.)

Furthermore, the program provides you with correctly spelled alternatives to the unrecognized word at the touch of a key and replaces the typed word with one of the alternatives with the touch of another key. You can add words to the dictionary at will or spell-check an entire screen of text at any time.

### Spell-checking improvements

Actually, spell-checking features are not new to personal computers — but they have improved tremendously since being introduced a few years ago. A brief review of the evolution of these programs shows how **Turbo Lightning** represents a true breakthrough in this area.

✓ The first computerized spell-checkers were *stand alone* programs, completely separate from word processing programs. After completing a document, you had to leave your word processing program, load the spell-checking program, and then check the document. These programs improved from about 1973 to 1981, but were never very popular, mainly because secretaries and typists found them too cumbersome and time-consuming to use.

✓ In 1982 and 1983, the companies that offered word processing programs began to include spell-checking within the word processing programs. As before, however, the checking was not typically done until the document was complete. And also as before, most secretaries and typists still avoided them.

✓ Then, from 1984 on, features were added to the best word processing programs that allowed you to spell-check individual pages within documents, paragraphs or even single words at the touch of a key. If you were unsure of a word, the computer would provide suggested words — all without leaving the document being drafted. Alas, many people thought that was as good as it was going to get . . .

✓ Just recently, however, Turbo Lightning was released by Borland International of Scotts Valley, Calif., a company already noted for innovative software products. For the first time, the spell-checking program was set up to run *simultaneously* with almost any IBM-compatible word processing program, actually reviewing each word as it is typed. Whenever a word is typed that's not in the built-in dictionary, the computer "beeps." At that point, you can either touch a key to get spelling suggestions and replace the typed word with a correct one, or ignore the beep and come back to it later.

Upon hearing about the new program I rushed to try out one of the first copies available. I wasn't the only one. Priced at only \$99.95, the product is so hot that the company has processed more than 20,000 orders in the first few weeks. Even in the go-go world of computer software, such instant success is very unusual.

### A few rough edges

After thoroughly testing Turbo Lightning and using it for my own daily work, I'm happy to report that it is remarkably well-executed for a brand-new program. My few criticisms will probably be addressed by the company in the future, but you should be aware of them if you decide to buy the version now being sold:

✓ Even though Turbo Lightning provides what they call "hot keys" to perform actions quickly (such as adding a word to the dictionary), these are countered by some unnecessary keystrokes that slow you down and break your train of thought. For example, before accepting a new word into the dictionary, it forces you to specify whether the new word should have an initial cap, all caps or no caps. Whew!

✓ Adding to the same problem is the fact that variations of many common words are not in the dictionary that comes with the program, forcing you to add them as you go along.

✓ Also, as the program works now, you probably will need to purchase an additional memory board for your computer to use it effectively. If the entire 83,000-word Random House Dictionary (which comes with the program) does not fit in your computer's memory, it will beep even when some words are spelled correctly, which can be annoying.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Despite the rough edges, Turbo Lightning is a real breakthrough — the first of an entire new generation of computer assisted spell-checking products. Even if you are a good speller and an excellent typist, it could save you embarrassment by catching typos that might otherwise get by. If you are a poor speller or typist, it can be a lifesaver.

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